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# THE SUPPRESSED PARTS OF A SHABU'OT PIYUṬ

BY A. MISHCON, London

“EVERYTHING—so goes the Zoharic saying—depends on good luck, even the Sepher-Tōrah in the ark.” Yea, we may add, even the *piyut* in the Maḥzor. There are two *piyutim* by Rabbi Simeon ben Isaac the Great (x—xi century) based on one and the same theme. Both were soon allotted prominent places in the קרובות for שבועות: the one headed ה' קנני on the first day, and the other, commencing שששששש יום יום, on the second day of the festival. Considerable parts of each of these *piyutim* were regarded objectionable and were banned by some over-zealous scribes. Yet how different was the fate of the one to that of the other. No sooner did the printer take the place of the copyist, than the second *piyut* was restored to its original form. It has thus been published ever since in the Ashkenazic Maḥzor, in the latest English edition<sup>1</sup> of which it has been admirably rendered into English verse. But the parts deleted from the other poem have to this day not gained re-admission to the Maḥzor. Heidenheim was apparently the first who undertook to give them publication and, with that object, included them among others in a

<sup>1</sup> מח' עבודת אהל מועד, ed. by A. Davis and others.

separate pamphlet entitled **מבוא המחזור**<sup>2</sup>. But the pamphlet has never seen the light.

It is thus for the first time that those lines, written some nine hundred years ago, are here being published.

The subject treated in these two *piyutim* is the Torah. We are told that long ere Moses appeared on the scene, the Heavenly Father was anxious for this beloved daughter of His to choose a spouse from among the sons of the earth, through whom she might be introduced to the children of men. Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs were thus mentioned as probable suitors, but the celestial maiden points out grave defects which put each of them beneath her dignity. It is the lines in which the faults of our progenitors are enumerated that were considered offensive and were accordingly suppressed.

That the *piyutim* were not altogether eliminated from the Maḥzor is undoubtedly due to the great respect commanded by their author, who was celebrated as a scholar and famous as a benefactor of his people.<sup>3</sup> Even those who denounced the poetical writings of Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Ezra because "the rays of wisdom (= mysticism) did not illumine them,"<sup>4</sup> could not fail to regard his poetry as "having been written in the proper (= mystic) manner."<sup>5</sup> For not only was our author a Kalirian to his finger-tips, but he was also a mystic of no mean order.<sup>6</sup>

The writer has only come across one Maḥzor (Romagna rite) where the **ה' קנני** is replaced by another

<sup>2</sup> See note in his Maḥzor, ed. 1805, IV, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Graetz (Eng. Edition), III, 252.

<sup>4</sup> **ספר חמדת הימים**, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> **או"ח, מג"א**, § 69.

<sup>6</sup> **ר' שמעון הגדול שהיה מלומד בנסים**: ed. Venice, 6a: **שבלי הלקט**.

*piyut*. In all other Maḥzorim examined the objectionable passages only are omitted and in the two or three where they are wholly or partly retained, they are left unvocalized. Since, as mentioned above, the other poem is printed completely in our Maḥzor, only the suppressed parts of the one just named are presented here as selected from some fourteenth century MSS. in the British Museum. They are given under the headings of the respective paragraphs which they supplement.

About him (Adam) did the Torah reply to the Only One: When he was one, Thou didst say, "It is not good that man should be alone," and didst give him a help-mate. Yet even with her he transgressed three of Thy commands: "Thou shalt not steal"—by sharing that which was stolen; "Thou shalt not bear false witness"—for he and his wife gave false evidence; "Thou shalt not covet"—for they both coveted and ate the forbidden fruit. He shall therefore not be crowned with glory.

עמד אדם — —

עליו השיבה תורה לאחד

בעת היה אחד הונעם יחד

וכשנשלף ממנו צלע אחד

שלש דברות הפר יחד

הפר לא תגנב וחלק עם גנב כאחד

הפר לא תענה והעיד עם אשתו  
עדות שקר יחד

הפר לא תחמד ויאכל ויחד

ובחופת כבוד לא לו יום אחד

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She retorted as to him (Noah):—If he be just and perfect so that he dealt

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פרש זה — —

פצה דת כתובה עליו להשיבה

with every animal in the ark according to Thy wish, wherefore was he so heedless on coming forth? He drank to excess and was drunken. He who resisted all the waters of the flood, did not resist the tempting drop! In the sight of his sons he lay naked and disgraced.

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Then the Torah exclaimed about the beloved one (Abraham) that he is well known to her as the Lord was known to him. He lacked understanding and questioned: "Wherefore shall I know?" He was then answered: "Thou wilt surely know." He thus suffered his descendants to be enslaved without knowing for how long.

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Of the only son (Isaac) did the law break forth in poetry: True he was found perfect and fit for a sacrifice. He gave himself up willingly to the

אם צדיק הוא ותמים בנתיבה  
וזהיר במצוה עם כל נפש בתבה  
למה לא נזהר בצאתו מן התבה  
וישת וישכר ולמאוד רוח  
הסבל במי המבול לא סבל  
טפת תאוה  
ויתגל בתוך השכיבה ובא לירי חובה  
ונתבה בעיני ניניו בערוע

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ציץ ממזרה — —  
צוחה אמון בדבר מורע  
כי כמו הורע כן נורע  
וכמו שמך יידע כן נתורע  
איך טולטל ממדע להבין ולירע  
ופץ בלי מדע במה אדע  
והקשיב על דבריו ידע תדע  
וגרם לניניו קץ מלידע

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קרבן שלם — —  
קול נתנה רת על יחיר בחירה  
אמנם נמצא שלם כזבח תודה

knife, the altar, and to be bound, and he was saved from sword and fire. Yet, in his old age he called the one whom Thou didst despise. "Take thy weapons," he said to him and thus permitted him the use of them for ever after; "thy quiver and thy bow"—and thus gave him dominion; "and go out to the field"—and conferred kingdom upon him. It was the virtuous woman that ordered the perfect one to prepare venison for his father, who—when he was scarce gone and his brother came back from hunting—exclaimed, "Who then is he?" and wanted to curse him who dwelt in the tents of learning. But for the voice that came from above, he said: "He, too, shall be blessed."

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His (Jacob's) sons did evil in selling their brother to Egypt because of the

והשלים נפשו למאכלת למזבח  
ולעקרה

ונושע מחרב וממקרה  
אך לעת זקנה וליום פקודה  
קרא לשונאך בחמד חמדה  
שא נא בליך זיין אותו יערה  
תליך וקשתך שלטון לו האחירה  
וצא השרה מלוכה אותו הסעירה  
לולי קדמה אשה חמודה  
וצותה לתם בתעודה  
וילך ויקח ויבא ויעש סעודה  
ויהי אך יצא ויבא ואחיו בא מצידה  
ונם מי אפוא וחרד חרדה  
ובקש לקלל יושב אהלי תעודה  
לולי בת קול ממרום ירדה  
ונם גם ברוך יהיה בתוך קהל ועדה

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רוחק איש שדה — —  
רע נמלו לדם<sup>ז</sup> למכר מכורה

<sup>ז</sup> The word is evidently לָחֵם, see Ps. 78, 51, etc.

distinguished coat that he made him. Also because of the dreams that he dreamed they hated him exceedingly. On being asked to recognize that coat he was overwhelmed with grief. "He is surely rent," cried he bitterly. The holy spirit had departed from him because of his misery, and he said in his wrath: "My way is hid from the Lord."

על דברת כתונת המנוכרה  
ועל חלומות אשר חלם שנאוהו  
שנאה חמורה  
בנאם הכר נא נפש זקן עברה  
ואנחה עליו גברה  
טרף טרף צעק צעקה גדולה ומרה  
ורוח הקדש מפני אכלו סרה  
ופץ בכעס וגם בעברה לומר אמירה  
מאת ה' דרכי נסתרה

A commentator asserts that the two *piyutim* under consideration are versified renderings of a Midrash which contained the entire legend. The writer's painstaking search has failed to trace such Midrash. The following passage, however, in *מדרש חזית*, I, 24, is a very close approach: "When Israel stood at Sinai, God said unto them, I will give you My Law on condition that you will bring sureties who should warrant its observance. Said they, Our Patriarchs will pledge for us. Whereupon He said, I have aught to say in their disfavor: Abraham doubted My word and asked, 'Whereby shall I know?'; Isaac preferred Esau whom I disliked; Jacob said, 'My way is hid from the Lord.'"